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ENHANCING THE CHANCE OF CONTINUATION OF STUDIES IN A DISADVANTAGEOUS REGION (2000-2005)

Introduction

The educators of Eszterházy Károly College have been investigating the problems of pupils in danger of school failure and lack of success, the questions relating to career guidance and methods of individual treatment.

The present research is carried out in the framework of the research project „Útkereső” (Pathfinder).

The aim of the research: the analysis of the special problems which may arise in schools (town-village) educating pupils with a multiply disadvantaged social background, how it is possible to help the social integration of pupils with disadvantaged background through revealing these problems.

Research sample: 131 teachers

The selection criteria of the primary schools were as follows:

- the proportion of students taking part in further education is below the national average (KSH)
- the settlement is not to have a secondary school
- the number of endangered students in the school is above the average in the region
- the number of the teaching staff does not exceed 40
- the primary school is teaches pupils with normal mental capacity

Research methods: questionnaire

The revealing of the problem is focused on the following subjects:

- Problems concerning the students
- Problems concerning the teaching institution
- Problems relating to the school environment

Results

Problems concerning the students

According to the teachers of village schools, the most serious problem is the pupils' social background and students' psychic condition. Their average is 1.4, which means that they consider these factors to be a very serious problem. They put second pupils with disadvantaged backgrounds, the average score is: 1.6. This shows that the teachers consider it a very serious and important problem. Placed third is the mental capacity of the pupils with a score of 1.7. This comes also close to the most important problems. The school achievement and the problems relating to the pupils in danger occupy the fourth place with the score 1.8. This comes also close to the important problems. School attendance is scored 2.2, while the health condition of the pupils is scored 2.8. All these results indicate the seriousness of the problems.

The number of pupils in the school is 38, which seems to be easy to handle.

According to the opinion of the town school teachers, endangered students represent the most serious problem: 1.8, and the pupils with disadvantaged backgrounds: 1.9. Teachers consider them significant problems. They put close to the above problems the mental capacity of the pupils with the score: 2.1, the social background of pupils, personal characteristics and psychic condition: 2.2. Average and significant problems are the pupils' school achievement, health condition: 2.4 and school attendance: 2.5. The number of pupils in the school seems to be easy to handle.

Number of the problem	Problems concerning the students	Score		Ranking	
		Town	Village	Town	Village
1	The number of pupils in the school	3.30	3.80	7	7
2	School attendance	2.50	2.20	6	5
3	Disadvantaged background	1.90	1.60	2	2
4	Endangered students	1.80	1.80	1	4
5	The pupils' social background	2.20	1.40	4	1
6	Mental capacity	2.10	1.70	3	3
7	Personal characteristics	2.20	1.60	4	2
8	School achievement	2.40	1.80	5	4
9	Health condition	2.40	2.80	5	6
10	Psychic condition	2.20	1.40	4	1
---	Total average score	2.30	2.05	---	---

Problems concerning the teaching institution

The village teachers think their financial position is the most important factor among the problems concerning the teaching institution: 2.0. The technical equipment of the schools is scored with an average of 2.9. The financial management of the school is scored 3.1.

Possibilities for in-service trainings and the condition of school buildings are scored 3.2.

In-school communication and conflict solution are not considered to be relevant problems: 3.9. The number of specialists at school is scored 4.0. The management of the school is scored 4.5 and the staff atmosphere is scored: 4.7.

According to the opinion of the town school teachers, the condition of school buildings is the main problem concerning the teaching institution: 1.7. They placed second the problem of their financial position: 1.9. Teachers consider them significant problems. The technical equipment of the schools is a significant average problem: 2.6. The financial management of the school is scored very similar: 2.8. Conflict solution: 2.9 and the staff atmosphere: 3.0 are average problems. The management of the school and in-school communication are scored: 3.1. The number of specialists at school and possibilities for in-service trainings seem to be easy to handle: 3.5.

Number of the problem	Problems concerning the teaching institution	Score		Ranking	
		Town	Village	Town	Village
1	The number of specialists	3.50	4.00	8	6
2	In-service trainings	3.50	3.20	8	4
3	Staff atmosphere	3.00	4.70	6	8
4	Condition of school buildings	1.70	3.20	1	4
5	Technical equipments	2.60	2.90	3	2
6	Financial position (salary)	1.90	2.00	2	1
7	The financial management	2.80	3.10	4	3
8	Management of the school	3.10	4.50	7	7
9	In-school communication	3.10	3.90	7	5
10	Conflict solution	2.90	3.90	5	5
---	Total average score	2.80	3.50	---	---

Problems relating to the school environment

The most important problem in this sphere in village schools is the unemployment of parents with an average of 1.1. A similar important problem is the educational level of the parents: 1.3. The parents' lifestyle seems to be also a significant factor: 1.6, home environment of the pupils and the way they spend their free time is scored 1.7. The economic situation of the settlement is scored very similar: 1.8. The attitude of the families to the school is scored 1.9. The management of the settlement is scored 2.4, which is rather significant. Close to the average score are the work of social helpers and the geographical situation of the settlement.

According to the opinion of the town school teachers, the unemployment of parents is the most important problem relating to the school environment: 1.6. Following problems are the educational level of the parents, home environment of the pupils and the parents' lifestyle: 1.8. The way the pupils spend their free time: 2.2 is a significant problem. The attitude of the families to the school is also a significant problem: 2.1. The management of the settlement seems to be an average problem: 2.9. The economic situation of the settlement and the work of social helpers scored 3.0. The geographical situation of the settlement seems to be a problem easy to handle: 3.4.

Number of the problem	Problems relating to the school environment	Score		Ranking	
		Town	Village	Town	Village
1	Unemployment of parents	1.60	1.10	1	1
2	The educational level of the parents	1.80	1.30	2	2
3	Home environment of the pupils	1.80	1.70	2	4
4	The parents lifestyle	1.80	1.60	2	3
5	The way the students spend their free time	2.20	1.70	4	4
6	Geographical situation of the settlement	3.40	2.50	7	8
7	Economic situation of the settlement	3.00	1.80	6	5
8	The management of the settlement	2.90	2.40	5	7
9	Social helpers of the settlement	3.00	2.50	6	8
10	The attitude of the families to the school	2.10	1.90	3	6
---	Total average score	2.36	1.90	---	---

On the bases of the research results, we came to the following conclusions:

Among the problems concerning the pupils, the most important are the pupils' social background and psychic condition. The following factors represent vital problems: the deviant elements in the pupils' personality,

disadvantaged background, endangered position, and mental capacity of the pupils. All these contribute to achievement. This situation is aggravated with irregular school attendance and health problems. The number of students in the class seems to be adequate.

One of the most important problems in the work of the teaching institution is the financial situation of the teachers and technical equipment of the school. The financial management of the school and the in-service training possibilities get average ranking. The teachers feel no problem in school communication and in the handling of conflicts. They consider the atmosphere of the staff and the work of the school management to be very good.

Among the problems relating to the school environment, the most important is the unemployment of parents and the very low level of education of the parents. The lifestyle of the parents and the home environment also represent serious problems.

The present research is carried out in the framework of the research project „Alma mater”.

The project aims are twofold:

On the one hand, it supports the successful further education of disadvantaged students with special training programmes, and on the other hand, it trains the teachers to run the programme.

The programme is concerned with the following groups:

Disadvantaged students in Northern Hungary, the parents of the students, the teachers and fellow student helpers involved in the programme.

The selection criteria of the primary schools were the following:

1. the proportion of students taking part in further education is below the national average (95.9% 1998/1999, KSH)
2. the settlement does not have a secondary school
3. the number of endangered students in the school exceeds the average in the region (5% 1998/1999, KSH)
4. the number of the teaching staff does exceed 40
5. the primary school teaches pupils with normal mental capacity

The selection criteria of the secondary schools were the following:

1. the number of commuting students exceeds the average in the region (45% 1998/99 KSH)
2. the number of students living in dormitories is above the average in the region (20% 1998/99 KSH)
3. the dropout proportion (the proportion of those entering the school and finishing the school) is above the national average in the case of secondary grammar schools (8.5% 1998/99, KSH)
4. the dropout proportion (the proportion of those entering the school and finishing the school) is above the national average in the case of secondary technical schools (3% 1998/99, KSH)
5. the dropout proportion (the proportion of those entering the school and finishing the school) is above the national average in the case of vocational schools (31.6% 1998/99. KSH)

In revealing the problem, we came to the following results:

1. Primary school teachers have no adequate analytic methods in their competence to be able to reveal the disadvantaged situation and learning difficulties in time, and at the same time are not properly prepared to support the further education of problematic students.
2. Parents of the primary school pupils (especially those of the disadvantaged ones) do not take an active part in discussing the questions relating to their children's further education.
3. Disadvantaged primary school pupils are not demanding in their choice of carrier, they do not know their own interest and possibilities and do not pay sufficient attention to them.
4. The further education of these students is not the result of a mutually (parent, teacher, student) decided and accepted action.
5. In secondary schools, the fit-in of these problematic students goes with difficulties and therefore the dropout rate is high.
6. Secondary school teachers are not prepared to tackle the problem of fitting in, they have difficulties in finding the values and problems of the new students.
7. There are no fellow student helpers in the secondary schools who, being of the same age, could give support in this transitional period.
8. There is no individual or group counselling in secondary schools, where students could resolve their problems with the help of specialists.

These problems cause difficulties in carrier choice, in the fitting into the secondary school, in the achievement of students in disadvantaged situation and, as a result, they do not meet the demands of the labour market. Unemployment pushes them to the periphery of society, and then the same problems are reproduced in the life of their children.

In view of the above problems, the specialist team and the teachers of primary and secondary schools worked out the following programme:

1. For the carrier planning of primary school students two trainings are worked out. "*Path finding*" and "*Where to go*".

The aim of the "*path finding*" training is to help primary school pupils in their carrier choice, to find their own values, potentials and limits.

The aim of the "*where to go*" training is to involve the students, the parents and the teachers in discussions about the further education of school leaving students. These training methods provide possibilities for discussions without any obligations.

2. *An information booklet is prepared for the parents* of primary school pupils. This information booklet gives useful information about carrier planning for the parents. This and "*where to go*" training together help parents make the decision.

3. For teachers in primary schools, we made up a *collection of investigating methods* containing questionnaires, tests, which they can use on their own.

In addition to this, the "*support training*" provides further help for common thinking.

The aim of the training is to help the teachers in the work of carrier planning.

The primary school teachers had already took part in the "*where to go*" programme.

4. For the students entering the secondary school, we have prepared a group of *fellow student helpers*, in this way the elder students are already prepared to meet the disadvantaged students in their school.

The importance of fellow student helpers in adolescent age is significant. They can authentically offer solutions to problems they themselves had to experience some years before.

5. We prepared *fit-in training* for disadvantaged students in secondary schools. In theses trainings, specialist conduct conversations, which help the student in the transitional period between primary and secondary school.

6. We prepared an "*introducing booklet*" for secondary school teachers, which gives a summary about the students entering the

secondary school written by the student, the parents and primary school teachers of the student. The slogan of the booklet is “*This is me*”.

For teachers of secondary schools, we have made up a *counselling training*, the aim of which is to provide basic counselling units. This helps the teachers to take part efficiently in the work with students coping with problems, and at the same time helps them to choose individual learning programmes and assist the student with it in future.

Expected results:

For the students:

1. The number of drop-out students in the transitional period will decrease
2. A more adequate carrier choice based on the abilities of the individual – the experience of success – the chance of getting out of the situation.
3. The fit-in process in the secondary school will be easier, and will go smoothly.

For the families (parents):

1. The number of those wishing to take an active part in the formation of the children’s future will increase.
2. They will have a clear picture about the possibilities to form the picture in their children.

For the teachers:

1. New competences will be acquired.
2. Carrier planning will be better established.
3. Cooperation between primary and secondary schools will be more efficient.